

GEDDY GARDEN NEWS

“Christmas comes on this month, let us all rejoice at this redeeming festival: In acts of charity assist distress, The poor will thank you, and God will you bless.”

George Washington 12/24/81, a letter to Major Wm. Heath

We are in the midst of the holy season of Advent and Hanukkah so it seems appropriate to dedicate this issue to some of the plants, flowers and trees that are related by legend, folklore or symbols to these holy seasons. The folklore has been passed on through centuries and some of our religious customs and traditions are an accumulation of such legends.

The relationship of God and nature has been recognized from antiquity. Certain garden designs were making direct relationship to God. The cloistered design of the hortus conclusis garden in the middle ages were contemplative gardens which enabled those within to escape from the chaos of the world. These were secure, walled in gardens and symbolic of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. These gardens provided a place for the pursuit of happiness and the highest level of happiness was not attained from what the early gains offered such as wealth, power and fame but from truth and knowledge.

Within these enclosed gardens the intrusions of the world were shut out and the desired goal could be reached which culminated in peace. Of course the message of Christ's coming at Christmas was to create peace on earth. The flowers grown within became associated with Mary and her outstanding characteristics, thus these gardens became known as Mary Gardens.

Some of the flowers that relate to the mother of God are the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon which are mentioned in Solomon 2:1 and symbolic of Mary's purity and her virtue of chastity. The violet, of which Sir Francis Bacon wrote, 'That which above all yields the sweetest smell in

the air is the violet' is symbolic of Mary's humility. Jasmine also known for its symbolism to Mary, the white color suggests the virtue of purity.

The flower that is most closely associated with Mary is the Rose. There is a legend related by St. Ambrose that tells of how the rose got its thorns. According to legend the rose grew in Paradise minus thorns but after the fall of man in the Garden of Eden the rose took on thorns to remind man of his loss of Paradise. Mary is called a 'Rose without thorns because she was exempt from original sin. The daisy is symbolic of the innocence and sweet simplicity of the Christ child and Lady Bed-Straw, so the legend tells us, was a plant among the straw in the manger where the infant Jesus laid. Pink Cisties, - a pink flower that blooms in Palestine in the spring produces a gum called Ladanum which is referred to in Genesis as Myrrh. When it is burned as incense it has a sweeter odor than Frankincense and it was those two resins, valued for their fragrance that were gifts of the Magi to the infant Jesus. Coriander is one of the bitter herbs to be eaten at Passover. The seed of Coriander becomes more fragrant the longer it is kept but the foliage has a strong offensive odor.

Even the maze in a garden had a significant meaning. The use of a maze reaches back to antiquity and was an allegorical path to salvation.

The spirit of Christmas can be truly found in a garden. Merry Christmas.

Janet Guthrie



Rose without thorns, from 1633 edition of Gerard's *Herball*